

Charles & Jacob Abraham
39 Pope Rd.

Planning Board

Request to Change Zoning Bylaws to Allow Firewood in the Town of Acton

Dear members of the Board,

It has come to my attention that producing and storing firewood is actually against zoning regulations in the town of Acton as stated in the Zoning bylaws table of prohibited uses in all zones section 3.7 “**Heating fuel sales, service and storage**” and in action taken on the property at 848 Main St. which is zoned small manufacturing. The Action also states that a “wood splitting operation is not a permitted use within the Town of Acton”. This greatly concerns me as a citizen and business. By enforcing this action, the enforcement officer has essentially banned any use or production of firewood, indoor or outdoor, in the town for personal or business use. This means a resident cannot heat with firewood or wood pellets, both of which have become popular as alternatives to oil and natural gas in recent years.

Not only will this potentially cost residents money in heating bills but it will hurt local businesses as well. Most gas stations, convenience stores, and supermarkets now sell small bundles of firewood at their stores. Even products such as “duraflame” logs would not be allowed. Any business that cooks with firewood, such as Sorrento’s Pizza, would not be allowed to continue either.

Even if the Board made it legal to store firewood there are also potentially environmental impacts involved with bringing in firewood from other locations. The Asian Longhorn Beetle in the Worcester area has been spreading and while there is a quarantine in effect, there have been people caught transporting potentially infected wood. The Emerald Ash Borer has also been confirmed in the western part of the state. To help avoid bringing any of these pests into the Acton and surrounding areas it makes sense to produce firewood locally.

The way I see it this law could also be used to stop solar installations in non residential zones as well, the only place solar is mentioned is bylaw

3.8.1.1 “Private garage or carport for not more than four motor vehicles, **solar system**, greenhouse, tool shed or barn; swimming pool or tennis court provided that such recreational facilities are used only by the residents and their guests.”

Have you heard of electric baseboard heat? Or solar hot water? Solar panels create electricity which can be used for heating purposes and can be used to heat water to supplement other heating sources. I’m sure Solarize Acton would prefer it if business were also allowed to produce solar power since they state that “The [Massachusetts Clean Energy Center](#) and the [Green Communities Division](#) of the [Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources](#) are excited to partner with residents and **business owners** in Acton to accelerate the adoption of solar PV, which will provide them with clean, economical, locally generated electricity. “.

I have taken trips throughout Acton looking for firewood piles that are easily visible from the street and have found over 200 residential locations that could be enforceable under the current zoning laws. The solar panels at the Junior High, Gould’s plaza, and the Acton Highway building would also have

to be removed. Rather than bring this to the attention of officials for enforcement I propose a change to the zoning laws.

I believe that the original intent of this bylaw was to prevent any more oil companies, such as Bursaw, Concord Oil, or Baker Whitney from moving into town, or to prevent a large oil refinery, LNG terminal or nuclear power plant. I do not believe that is was meant to prevent the use of a locally available “fuel” source such as firewood or solar power. I would like to see some language added into the zoning bylaws allowing the production of renewable energy, including but not limited to wood products (including firewood, cordwood, and wood pellets), and solar. Any production would still have to adhere to local bylaws regarding pollution and building restrictions having to do with size and setbacks as stated in zoning bylaw

3.6.3 Manufacturing – A manufacturing facility, such as a printing or publishing plant; manufacturing of building systems and components; fabrication and assembly of electronic components, precision instruments, or other high technology products; manufacturing of metal products or office supplies; software or hardware development or manufacturing; research or testing of new and emerging technologies and technological devices; establishments engaged in services related to the environment; development and manufacturing of renewable energy or alternative energy (RE/AE) equipment and systems; or similar USES and activities; including office, administrative, laboratory, and support facilities related to the foregoing; but excluding scientific USE as defined in Section 3.6.4. All operations shall confine disturbing smoke, fumes, dust, noise, and other emissions within the premises. No research or testing shall be conducted outside of a BUILDING. In the KC District, the maximum NET FLOOR AREA of an establishment that is classified as a Manufacturing USE shall not exceed 10,000 square feet.

A change such as this would allow the average homeowner and business to “manufacture” firewood and solar energy as long as they follow all other zoning bylaws. I am hoping to bring these changes about with a vote at the next town meeting to exclude firewood, cordwood, and solar from the prohibited uses table. I request the boards support in this matter and would like suggestions as to how to properly word a bylaw change to satisfy all parties, and a stay on all infractions until an updated zoning bylaw is passed.

Thank you for your time

-Charles & Jacob Abraham